

Message Text

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71-62

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07

LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 L-03 NSC-05

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R 041302Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9783

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMCONSULATE CASABLANCA

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 1455

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB PINS EG

SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARY DELAYS CAUSE FURTHER POSTPONEMENT OF UNIONS
ELECTIONS

REF: 75 CAIRO 11109 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: DRAFT TRADE UNION BILL IS BOGGED DOWN IN PEOPLES'

ASSEMBLY FORCING FURTHER POSTPONEMENT OF UNION ELECTIONS AND
REDUCING INCUMBENT LABOR LEADERS TO LAMER DUCKS THAN EVER.
PARLIAMENTARY DELAY HAS REVOLVED AROUND QUESTION OF WHETHER
UNION MEMBERS WITH HIGHER EDUCATION SHOULD BE MADE ELIGIBLE
TO RUN FOR ELECTIVE POSTS. RIVALRY BETWEEN ENTRENCHED LABOR
LEADERS AND MANPOWER MINISTER HAS EXACERBATED ISSUE AND
SERVED TO CONCEAL MORE FUNDAMENTAL POLITICAL PROBLEM: HOW
TO SQUARE PRINCIPLE OF MORE OPEN UNION ELECTIONS WITH RISK
THAT BETTER EDUCATED CANDIDATES WILL TURN OUT TO BE POLITICAL
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LEFTISTS. END SUMMARY.

1. TRADE UNION ELECTIONS THAT WERE RE-SET FOR JANUARY (REFTEL) HAVE BEEN DEFERRED INDEFINITELY, PENDING ENACTMENT OF DRAFT TRADE UNION BILL CURRENTLY BOGGED DOWN IN PEOPLES' ASSEMBLY. ACCORDING TO KNOWLEDGEABLE EGYPTIAN LABOR FEDERATION (ELF) OFFICIAL, HOPES FOR RAPID PASSAGE OF DRAFT LAW ENDED WHEN ISSUE OF ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR ELECTION TO UNION OFFICES REVIVED SIMMERING FEUD BETWEEN ELF LEADERSHIP AND MANPOWER MINISTER ABDULLATIF BALTIYA.

2. BALTIYA, ARGUING FOR GREATER DEMOCRATIZATION IN LABOR MOVEMENT, HAS SOUGHT TO AMEND EXISTING QUALIFICATIONS, WHICH LIMIT UNION OFFICE-HOLDERS TO "WORKERS" (I.E. UNION MEMBERS WITH NO MORE THAN SECONDARY EDUCATION), TO PERMIT SOME "PROFESSIONALS" (I.E. UNION MEMBERS WITH HIGHER EDUCATION) TO HOLD ELECTIVE POSTS. IN TURN, ELF LEADERS HAVE ATTEMPTED TO HOLD THE LINE AT THE "WORKERS" LEVEL, TO PROTECT THEIR OWN POSITIONS AND TO PREVENT WHAT THEY SUSPECT IS A MANEUVER BY BALTIYA TO BUILD UP PERSONAL FOLLOWING AMONG "PROFESSIONALS" THAT COULD BE USED AGAINST THEM.

3. WHEN BALTIYA PERSUADED ASSEMBLY LABOR COMMITTEE TO AMEND DRAFT BILL TO OPEN 20 PERCENT OF LOCAL UNION POSTS TO "PROFESSIONALS", ENTRENCHED LABOR LEADERS REACTED WITH VEHEMENCE, CALLING FOR OUTRIGHT EXCLUSION OF "PROFESSIONALS" FROM UNION MEMBERSHIP. DEEP DIVISIONS WERE UNDERSCORED WHEN ELF SEC GEN SALAH GHARIB AND BALTIYA ENGAGED IN PUBLIC SHOUTING MATCH - SUBSEQUENTLY REPORTED IN PRESS -ON COMMITTEE FLOOR.

4. DRAFT BILL WAS FINALLY VOTED OUT BY COMMITTEE ON FEBRUARY 1 AND IS TENTATIVELY SLATED TO BE CONSIDERED NEXT WEEK ON ASSEMBLY FLOOR WHERE ELIGIBILITY ISSUE IS LIKELY TO BE AIRED ANEW. IN THE MEANTIME, THERE ARE INCREASING SIGNS OF IMPATIENCE AMONG TRADE UNION MEMBERS OVER REPEATED DELAY OF ELECTIONS. IN EARLY JANUARY, TWO OF THE NATIONAL GENERAL UNIONS (REPRESENTING PRINTING WORKERS AND ENGINEERING WORKERS RESPECTIVELY) ISSUED PRESS COMMUNIQUE IN WHICH THEY THREATENED TO GO AHEAD WITH THEIR OWN ELECTIONS IN FEBRUARY IF NEW LAW WERE NOT ENACTED.

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5. BALTIYA HAS TOLD US PRIVATELY THAT HE ANTICIPATES ENACTMENT BY MARCH AT THE LATEST. ELECTIONS WOULD THEN PRESUMABLY FOLLOW. ONE ELF OFFICIAL, HOWEVER, HESITATED TO PREDICT THEIR TIMING, CONTENDING THAT EVEN WITH NEW LAW IN EFFECT, PREVAILING LABOR CLIMATE BY SPRING COULD WELL LEAD AUTHORITIES TO ORDER FURTHER DEFERRAL OF VOTING.

6. COMMENT: PERSONAL RIVALRY OVER UNION OFFICE ISSUE HAS SERVED TO OBSCURE MORE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM, NAMELY WHETHER SADAT'S LIBERALIZATION POLICIES SHOULD BE APPLIED TO TRADE UNIONS. ONE OF DRAFT LAW'S MAIN OBJECTIVES, ACCORDING TO BALTIYA, IS TO GIVE ORGANIZED LABOR "AUTONOMY" (OR "INDEPENDENCE", AS SALAH GHARIB PUTS IT). GIVEN (A) DANGER THAT LIBERALIZATION WOULD RESULT IN INFLUX OF EDUCATED LEFTIST "PROFESSIONALS" TO OFFICE AND (B) POTENTIAL FOR WORKER DISCONTENT IN EGYPT, ONE CAN ONLY SURMISE THAT LABOR LEADERS WHETHER "PROFESSIONALS" OR "WORKERS", WILL BE OBLIGED TO WALK UNCHARTED COURSE BETWEEN REPRESENTING THEIR MEMBERS' INTERESTS AND PREVENTING OUTBREAKS OF WORKER UNREST.
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